
A History of Printing in Colonial Maryland

NICHOLAS HASSELBACH, 1765-1770

Nicholas Hasselbough or Hasselbach,¹ a German who had emigrated to Philadelphia in August 1749, is known to have been employed in the year 1755 "as papermaker in the late Mr. Koch's papermill on the Wissahicken." He is said to have learned printing from Christopher Sower, the universal genius of Germantown, and it is known that in the year 1762 he established a press in Philadelphia in conjunction with Anthony Armbruester,² a printer who was active for many years in the production of works in the German language. Of their activities only one imprint remains.³ Two other Philadelphia imprints of the years 1762 and 1763 have been recorded as bearing the name of Hasselbach alone.⁴ He is known to have been in Philadelphia as late as April 1764, but a little more than a year later, on July 6, 1765, Thomas Harrison transferred to him the lot in Baltimore Town next to the Market House, which stood on what is now the northwest corner of Gay and Baltimore Streets.

It is probable that at this location Hasselbach set up his printing establishment. He made other purchases of real estate in succeeding years, and after his death his widow, Catherine Hasselbach, leased and purchased various properties in Baltimore and its vicinity. Late in the year 1769 or early in 1770 Nicholas Hasselbach was lost at sea while in passage for Europe to arrange there the details of a business venture, the nature of which is unknown. In the year 1775 his widow rendered the first account of her husband's estate which, less all debts, was valued at nearly two thousand pounds sterling.⁵ It does not appear that she continued his press, but she kept his equipment until the year 1773, when she sold it to William Goddard, then newly come to Baltimore.⁶

It is said that the principal issues of Hasselbach's press, the first in Baltimore, were school books and other small works in the German and Eng-

¹ Isaiah Thomas spells the name as first given. On the only known Baltimore imprint of this printer bearing his name, it is spelled "Hasselbach."

² Isaiah Thomas, 2d ed., gives an interesting account of Anthony Armbruester.

³ See Seidenstricker, O., *First Century of German Printing in America, 1728-1830*. Philadelphia, 1893.

⁴ One of these, a German almanac for 1764, bore "Chestnut Hill" as its place of publication.

⁵ Isaiah Thomas has a sketch of Hasselbach, but the greater part of the information given above was obtained from George W. McCreary's sketch of the printer in his reprint of Hasselbach's known Baltimore imprint, published in Baltimore in 1903 under the title of *The First Book Printed in Baltimore-Town*. Hasselbach's widow married a second time, George Aikenhead, a Scotch merchant of Baltimore, and after his death in 1781, she took as her third husband, George Dowig, a Baltimore silversmith and jeweller who died in 1807. The former Mrs. Hasselbach died in the same year in the eighty-second year of her age. The Hasselbachs were members of the First German Reformed Church of Baltimore, and their descendants intermarried with some of the leading families of that place.

⁶ Isaiah Thomas records that Goddard afterwards sold part of this equipment to Francis Bailey of Lancaster, Pennsylvania.